

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
June 3, 2009**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Scott Rogers (Chairman)

John Cook	Rick Moulton
Dave Wulfson	Dave Allaire
George Barrett	Chris Andreasson
Charlie Moore	Charles Hunter
Mike Coates	Rep. Sonny Audette
Rep. Bill Aswad	Joann Erenhouse

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Robert Ide, VTrans Rail Operations Section  
Charlie Miller, VTrans Rail Operations Section  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans Rail Operations Section  
Doug Zorzi, VTrans  
Clay Poitras, VTrans  
Costa Pappis, VTrans  
Scott Bascom, VTrans  
Susan Clark, VTrans  
Gina Campoli, VTrans  
Stephen Vantire, State Auditor's Office  
Jan Okolowicz, Parsons Brinkerhoff  
Stephen Rolle, Parsons Brinkerhoff  
John Wilson, Jacobs  
Michael Desrochers, Jacobs Engineering  
David Holst-Grubbe, Clean Diesel Tech.  
MaryAnn Jakubowski, Castleton Depot, LLC  
Mary Anne Michaels, VRS  
Chris Parker, VRAN  
Matt Levin, VCE  
Roger Thompson, FHWA  
Tom Macaulay, Rutland Redevelopment Authority  
Dave Crawford, Essex Junction Village Manager  
Robin Pierce, Essex Junction Development Director  
Sawyer Joecks, Village of Essex Junction  
Bill Hollister, Amtrak  
Eleni Churchill, CCMPO  
Richard Currier, NH Central Railroad  
Brad Worthen, Burlington Airport  
Pete Synder, citizen

---

**1. Call to Order & Approval of Minutes**

Scott Rogers called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Introductions were made. Chairman Rogers announced the question and answer session with Transportation Secretary David Dill has been postponed to a future meeting due to the special session of the legislature.

Approval of Minutes

*March 25, 2009*

**MOTION by Mike Coates, SECOND by Dave Allaire, to approve the 3/25/09 minutes with the following corrections/clarifications:**

**Page 2, Amtrak Report, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph, sentence reading: “Carl Fowler commented...” – correct the spelling of “Acela Express”;**

**Page 3, top of page, sentence reading: “NECR is working with a gas supplier...” – change “Montreal” to “Montpelier”, and in the sentence reading: “Frank Rogers, NECR, ...” – change “NECR” to “PW Railroad”;**

**Page 5, sentence reading: “It was announced Karen Ray...” – correct the spelling of “Rae”.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

**2. Final Report: Western Corridor Transportation Management Plan**

Jan Okolowicz with Parsons Brinkerhoff reported work on the Western Corridor Transportation Management Plan has been ongoing since August, 2007. The study has been a cooperative effort between VTrans, regional planning commissions along the corridor, and the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization to produce a report on existing conditions and future transportation needs in the corridor. All modes were considered. The plan does not recommend any particular project.

Steve Rolle, Parsons Brinkerhoff, gave a presentation on the study and a summary of recommendations for the 195 mile corridor running from Canada to Massachusetts. Highway and rail systems across five counties were reviewed. Goals include improving the highway system and freight movement (reliability and connections) as well as enhancing public transit (access to services and establishing passenger rail service), economic development (supporting Vermont businesses and growth in passenger and freight transport), and quality of life (limiting environmental impacts through compact development and mixed uses). Options were evaluated against the goals. Highway improvements include signalization and circulation of traffic in towns, managing access, providing passing lanes and shoulder width. Freight improvements include upgrading weight limits, decreasing border constraints, improving access to rail and airports, adding transload freight facilities, marketing rail served properties, and preserving rail frontage for uses benefiting from rail access. Public transit improvements include expanding public transit services, inter and intra-state bus service, and improved access. Economic development will be enhanced with improved air service to the area and support of Vermont businesses with improved access to air and rail transport. Quality of life is improved with reduced traffic impact via operating and noise agreements, implementing streetscape and traffic calming, using alternate fuel vehicles, and having compact, mixed use development in communities. Next steps with the plan include concluding the public hearings, finalizing recommendations and the draft implementation plan and then the final report.

Rob Ide asked about features in a regional operating agreement to promote quality of life. Mr. Rolle suggested actions to regulate truck movements through a community, such as specifying time of day movements.

Rep. Audette asked about trucks on Route 7 going through Burlington. Eleni Churchill stated the CCMPO will be looking at origination and destination data on the trucks going through Burlington. Joann Erenhouse asked if the impact of one large shipper was considered (UPS is dropping overnight air delivery in New England). Jan Okolowicz said UPS was not contacted specifically. A shipper survey is underway which asks about issues in the future and what will entice a company to use rail transport versus truck transport.

Dave Allaire commented positively on the benefit of having five regional planning commission and the MPO coordinating on the study.

Rep. Aswad asked if cost estimates for each element are included in the report. Mr. Rolle stated cost will be described in a range (general magnitude of cost). The report does not recommend a specific projects or cost. The report generally prioritizes actions and strategies by goal.

Dave Wulfson stated the users of the report need to be aware the railroad industry is exempt from the plan. The railroad will build what is needed. It is suggested the consultants work with the railroads in advance to further the plan recommendations. Jan Okolowicz said a process to identify the best opportunities to develop a site for rail service was done. The document should be used as a tool to move forward.

Rick Moulton expressed disappointment in the lack of specificity in the report which was thought to be a visioning for the western corridor. Improving traffic flow by adding lanes states the obvious, said Mr. Moulton, and the study does not address with a vision how to improve flow in a corridor and link various transportation modes. Steve Rolle assured there is more detail in the complete report than in the short public presentation. Eleni Churchill added a vision was developed along with goals/objectives to accomplish the vision. All the information is contained in the full report, but not specifically project by project. Mike Coates also stated his disappoint that the document is generalized, that the document does not pin down problems in the western corridor. A cracker company was mentioned, but not OMYA, a major shipper, noted. Mr. Coates. Mr. Okolowicz said OMYA along with other shippers, truckers, and the railroads participated in the focus groups. Eleni Churchill stressed there are strategies in the report to address issues on the western corridor. The report includes the rail link from Burlington to Essex and the CLP to Whitehall.

### **3. Amtrak Report**

#### **Ridership**

Charlie Miller reported April ridership on the Ethan Allen Express and the Vermonter shows about an 8% increase. Revenues are up 10% on the Vermonter and 5% on the

Ethan Allen Express. Year to date ridership is up 3.5% and revenues are up .4% which is a little short of budget, but this is offset by the savings in fuel costs. On time performance in April was 85% on the Vermonter and 58.5% on the Ethan Allen Express, an improvement over last year.

Dave Wulfson announced New York State approved their budget with \$1.5 million for rail which is the grant application by CLP for construction work in April, May, June 2010 plus projects through the FRA.

#### National Train Day

Pictures of the grand opening of the Castleton train station were shown. Thanks were extended to MaryAnn Jakubowski (Castleton Depot, LLC), VTrans staff and the railroad for their work on the public/private cooperative effort.

#### Amtrak Commercials

Video ads for the Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express were viewed. The cost of the productions was about \$2,500. There will be some advertising in the White River Jct. market area and possibly on cable, U-tube, the state rail website and tourism website. There was mention of promoting train service to Vermont in places outside of the state (i.e. post ads in New York for trains going to Vermont). It was suggested the video ads be available to all chambers of commerce in the state. George Barrett credited Mike Coates for the advertisement idea that was initially suggested over three years ago.

Rob Ide mentioned his recent interview about rail on public radio in Vermont and Connecticut.

#### Amtrak Service in Castleton

Bill Hollister reported Amtrak received stimulus money and is applying funds toward the Castleton station. Accessibility to the train from the platform and a passenger information display system are needed, but service does not need to be delayed for these items. It is hoped to have service to Castleton in place by September before the start of the college semester. Rep. Audette asked about using stimulus money to get Amtrak into Burlington. Mr. Hollister assured Amtrak has been discussing Vermont's western corridor project.

#### **4. Update on Stimulus Package and Discussion of Potential Projects**

Rob Ide reported at the FRA sponsored meeting on the stimulus package in Philadelphia on 6/2/09 the message was to think regionally when submitting applications (i.e. feeder lines and such). Applications for single state improvements will not be considered as highly as applications for regional improvements. Regarding Vermont's commitment to rail, the state has consistently supported the subsidy to Amtrak and partnered with the railroads in Vermont. Bill Hollister noted the FRA stimulus funds do not require a match, but there is much competition from all the states for the money. The application deadline is September 15<sup>th</sup> for the November 15<sup>th</sup> award date. The rules will be released on June 17<sup>th</sup>. The FRA indicated they will do awards prior to the closing date for applications.

Charlie Moore asked if states offering match money are given an advantage to receive funding. Rob Ide was not certain to what degree. Mr. Moore asked for an example of a regional application. Mr. Ide envisioned an application from the Council of New England Governors (CONEG) or an application packaged to cover as large an area as possible. Rep. Audette suggested mentioning money available for freight on the western corridor (Jeffords earmark) in the application. Mr. Ide agreed, noting though that it is difficult to program the Jeffords earmark money until what is happening with stimulus money is known.

George Barrett asked for a delineation of the western corridor in Vermont. Mr. Ide stated the rail corridor starts at the border in East Alburgh and goes south to St. Albans to Essex to Burlington to Hoosick, New York. Sonny Audette added the legislature included study of Bennington to Whitehall.

Rob Ide mentioned New Hampshire is trying to rejoin the high speed rail corridor, but a corridor has already been identified outside of New Hampshire. Matt Levin asked if the Knowledge Corridor has been factored in as well. Mr. Ide confirmed it is part of the conversation.

Mike Coates recalled the impetus for the interstate highway system was national defense and asked if there is any tie in to passenger rail corridors and national defense. Bill Hollister said Amtrak works closely with the TSA and Department of Homeland Security. Charlie Miller stated in the break out groups at the FRA meeting on 6/2/09 there was discussion of a national system that corridors will tie into on the necessity side, not the national defense side.

Chris Andreasson asked if stimulus money is available to upgrade rail to 286,000 pound capacity. Mr. Ide stated the larger pool of money is for passenger service and if rail bed improvements are done for passenger rail service then freight will move faster as well. Mr. Andreasson asked if Amtrak is reviewing the state percentage to maintain service. Mr. Ide said discussion has begun on the new contract. There do not appear to be significant new charges. At the recent FRA meeting there was a suggestion that federal money be used in a shared role with state money to subsidize Amtrak service. Bill Hollister said Amtrak has been tasked by Congress to do a pricing model for all the states.

John Cook asked about international connections with Amtrak. Rob Ide confirmed conversations about again going to Montreal have begun. Mr. Hollister said there is a big boost in city pairs by marketing the service in between. Amtrak provides marketing money for states to promote routes in their territory. Joann Erenhouse suggested presenting the idea of making it easier for Canadians to come to this country to spend money rather than US citizens going to Canada to shop.

Charles Hunter briefed the Council on the application by New England Central Railroad (\$69 million package) which will result in a savings of approximately 40 minutes in run time on the Vermonter route. Rail America will provide some matching funds.

**5. Freight Report**

Charles Hunter reviewed the presentation on NECR given to the legislature in 2009. NECR operates and maintains 218 miles of track in Vermont, spends approximately \$7 million on Vermont goods and services annually and up to \$7 million in capital investment, employs about 100 people, has a payroll over \$4 million, and handled over 77,000 Amtrak passengers on the NECR route in 2008. In the current economic climate business is off 30%.

George Barrett commented without the work that was done by NECR on the Burlington tunnel movement of cars by rail would not be possible.

Dave Wulfson reported business is off for Vermont Railways as well and as a result the labor force has been reduced. Auto transport is on the horizon for Vermont Railways. The Hoosick Jct. connection with Norfolk Southern has started though there are delays due to construction farther south on the line. Other projects include rail installation north of Rutland, ties south of Rutland, work from Whitehall to Fair Haven with the \$1.5 million from New York, work from Fair Haven to West Rutland with FRA funding, rail work on the Green Mountain Railroad, and ties and surface work on the Connecticut River line north of St. Johnsbury. Transport of lumber and construction goods is off due to the decline in the building and construction business. Transportation of rock from the quarry in Barre is still being discussed. As fuel costs improve the project is being resurrected. Mr. Wulfson stressed the need to improve bridges on the rail lines to support heavier weights.

There was mention of the Middlebury rail spur. The EIS is complete and the Record of Decision is to be issued by FHWA in the next couple of weeks.

**6. Passenger Rail Subcommittee Report**

Charlie Moore reported the Passenger Rail Subcommittee met on May 21<sup>st</sup> and discussed Amtrak ridership, DMU cars, preservation of the Ethan Allen Express service, Train Day, and the western corridor as the priority (Vermonters going to Montreal). A developer from Palmer discussed with the group having the Vermonter stop in Palmer, MA.

**7. Infrastructure Subcommittee Report**

Mike Coates reported the subcommittee met on May 21<sup>st</sup> and discussed the possibility of using stimulus money to do the needed work on state owned rail bridges to bring the bridges up to standard for weight and safety. Rob Ide acknowledged bridges are an extreme challenge facing the state. There was discussion of bonding for repairs of bridges for safety purposes and carry over of state funds. Scott Rogers noted there is a budget deficit in FY09 of \$7.5 million and carry over funds from programs may be used to eliminate the deficit. The rail budget is \$20 million of which \$11 million is federal funds and \$9 million is state funds with Amtrak being about \$4 million of the state amount. Rick Moulton observed highway bridges are incremental, but rail is only as good as its weakest link. If a bridge is closed then the entire line is shut down. Rob Ide assured the

state is not advocating running trains over unsafe bridges. Bridges are inspected on an on-going basis.

Mike Coates read legislation by Rep. Aswad relative to VTrans preparing a comprehensive detailed project plan to create passenger rail service from Burlington to Rutland to Bennington to Albany, NY and delivering the plan to the House and Senate committees on transportation by June 30, 2009. Mike Coates also read Section 113 (ABRB) of H.438 FY10 Transportation Program Conference Report regarding the western rail corridor.

#### **8. Discussion of Essex-Burlington/NECR Proposal**

Dave Crawford, Manager of the Village of Essex Junction, reviewed the proposal to upgrade the Burlington to East Alburgh rail line, noting the project is an important piece of the western corridor upgrade which can be done this construction season. NECR is providing the 20% match (over \$1 million) to the earmarked funds for the western corridor. The project is a public/private cooperative effort and has broad regional support.

**MOTION by Mike Coates, SECOND by George Barrett, that the Vermont Rail Council supports and requests that VTrans implement the project to improve the western corridor section of rail from Burlington to East Alburgh to 286,000 pound standard by utilizing the SAFTEA-LU earmarked funds secured by Sen. Jeffords which will be supplemented by New England Central Railroad's commitment to provide a private capital investment for the required 20% rail funding match, and further, the Vermont Rail Council supports the inclusion of safety multi-use paths through the Village of Essex Junction with funding coming from other sources.**

**DISCUSSION:** Chris Andreasson asked if the project could jeopardize the work on Bridge #219. Rob Ide confirmed money for Bridge #219 is from the Jeffords earmark. If VTrans had confirmation about the stimulus money the situation may be different. Of the \$26.85 million of the Jeffords earmark \$3.6 million is authorized as of 6/2/09. If stimulus money is not available then there is more pressure on the Jeffords earmark. It is an issue of making choices in spending, stated Mr. Ide. From 2011 to 2013 there will be \$4 million expended for Bridge #219. In 2010 final design will be done at a cost of \$700,000. Charlie Moore pointed out the state does not have to provide match money for the proposed project in Essex Jct., but does have to provide a match for the bridge work. Doug Zorzi noted work on Bridge #219 is for 286,000 pound capacity and to fix existing problems. Joann Erenhouse asked if the upgrade from Burlington to East Alburgh is included in the stimulus money application. Rob Ide stated VTrans budgeted for the work under a known revenue source. The situation with stimulus money is not known at this time, but will likely be known before completing the work on Bridge #219. There was further discussion of spending the Jeffords earmark on the Burlington-Essex project versus Bridge #219. Rob Ide read the federal statute on SAFETEA-LU which notes the priority as the Middlebury rail spur, improving passenger rail from Manchester to Rutland to Charlotte and freight rail through major cities. Dave Wulfson mentioned the priority list

prepared by the Infrastructure Committee which included 286,000 pound capacity from Florence to Rutland to Bellows Falls to Brattleboro and Amtrak service from Rutland to Burlington. Mike Coates assured the Infrastructure Committee has not changed the priorities. Dave Wulfson recalled Vermont Railways has also offered to provide match money on projects in the past. Charlie Moore stated the earmarked funds have been idle long enough. There is now opportunity for a private company providing match money for a project and the Rail Council should support the proposal, urged Mr. Moore. George Barrett suggested the upgrade from Alburgh to Burlington should be in the stimulus application. Rob Ide stated the Jeffords earmark will remain if stimulus money is used on the western corridor. The earmarked funds can be used in other areas if the state can provide match money. Chris Andreasson suggested amending the motion to say the Rail Council believes the project (rail line between Alburgh and Burlington) should be a top priority and VTrans should do all that can be done to do this project and maintain Bridge #219 as a top priority as well. Tom Macauley (Rutland) recalled the western corridor money is based on fees from the Middlebury rail spur to pay the local match. The impact of not completing the work on Bridge #219 and not being able to move material south and not using the GRIP model needs to be considered. Charles Hunter stated NECR prioritizes bridges and funding so bridges do not fail. The plan is to do the bridge work on Bridge #219 in 2013 so the bridge obviously is not going to collapse any time soon. Joann Erenhouse commented it is a slippery slope to set priorities unless a better offer is received. Mike Coates stressed the state should be flexible enough to make a change. The proposal will provide 286,000 pound capacity from the border to Burlington, said Mr. Coates, and the project is high profile as people will see something being done on the railroad. Sonny Audette stated the proposal is a win-win for the state and will help take cars off the road. People will use a commuter rail service from Essex to Burlington. In addition, continued Rep. Audette, private funds are helping with the cost of the work. Brad Worthen, transportation consultant for Burlington Airport, recalled there was another project with matching funds from a private business and the project was completed very fast. Mr. Worthen announced a meeting on 6/4/09 at the Burlington Airport to discuss rail interaction with the airport. Growth in passenger numbers is anticipated and the improved rail corridor will be greatly utilized, confirmed Mr. Worthen. Scott Rogers pointed out the motion is a recommendation, not an implementation directive. VTrans will take the matter under advisement. Funding is the issue. Rob Ide suggested getting an opinion on the matter from Rail Council members not in attendance. There were no further comments.

**VOTING:** all ayes except one abstention (Dave Wulfson); motion carried.

## **9. Other Business**

### Proposal for Bonding for Rail



Sonny Audette suggested staff develop a proposal for bonding for rail, especially bridge work.

**10. Next Meeting/Agenda Items**

Next Meeting: September 2, 2009 at 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in Rutland (specific location to be announced).

**11. Adjournment**

**MOTION by Mike Coates, SECOND by John Cook, to adjourn the meeting.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

*RScty: M.E.Riordan*